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Abstract

This article investigates the ambiguous potential of webcameras, as they are currently being used by nature conservation societies to broadcast non-human animal life 24/7, for relationships of species companionship. The article presents a post-phenomenological analysis of structures of webcam viewing. It is argued that while this viewing can affirm the power of technology and human animals over nature, sustained viewing also affords visual co-presence of human viewers with nonhuman animal life, a first basic condition for species companionship. A second condition of companionship must be that animals are experienced as living beings in their own right. Webcam viewing contains nonhuman animals as objects for spectacle in a viewing space defined by the human eye. It is argued however, that camviewing also invites 'haptic' viewing that challenges optical viewing regimes and established subject-object hierarchies. Haptic viewing speaks to the bodies of viewers, touching them and drawing them out of themselves into animal life as shared life. Webcam viewing is not symmetrical. Nonhuman animals do not relate to the camera in the same way as human animals. Nevertheless, they are not absent from the design and set-up of the camera, and actively participate in the hermeneutic work taking place. The article concludes that there is room for improvement in current practices to further challenge one sided relationships of voyeurism, such as making the participation of non-human animals more explicit and facilitating haptic over optical viewing by the organisation of the views.

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***Keywords**: webcamera, conservation, phenomenology, species-companionship*

'I would like to remember us all that this land is not ours. That we are not the owners of the lives that live on it. That our children have the right to see it like we do: full of wild animals, and life and freedom. AfriCam help us to do this!' (Claudia, forumpost, qtd. in Armitage 236)

Companion Species

Human animals have always lived among nonhuman animals, and to an extent, we still do. Animals soar high above us in the sky. They crawl, myriads of them, in the hidden corners of our homes and yards. They buzz around us as we sit outside on a warm summer evening. They curl up on our sofas or cross the road in front of our cars, often to their peril. Mary Midgley rightly criticises the existentialist notion of man as abandoned in the universe (19). This, she argues, is much less a denial of God than a dismissal of almost the entire biosphere. Among the various life-forms that surround us, animals occupy a special place for human beings. They are different from us and like us at the same time. That is why, Midgley claims, we like watching animals and animal behavior (18). Watching animals helps us understand the world and also ourselves. In line with this idea, Donna Haraway identifies human and other animals as 'constitutively, companion species' (16). Moving beyond Midgley, she also points to the fact that through our actions we affect each other. As we play with each other, watch, use, contaminate or eat each other, 'we make each other up, in the flesh' (Haraway 16).

It is also true, however, that much nonhuman animal life has been consigned to the margins of human civilisation. We do not live and work with animals on a daily basis in the way former generations did. And where we do, we often fail to notice it. The denigration of nonhuman animal life to dead matter in existentialism is one expression of a more general – albeit predominantly Western – tendency to see animal and human life as radically different. Where this difference is at the same time conceived of in an anthropocentric way, focusing on what are considered specifically human qualities, nonhuman animals become invisible to humans even in their presence (Fudge 27).

The complex relationship that we have with nonhuman animals does not diminish our desire to watch them. Increasing urbanisation has almost everywhere been accompanied by the rise of special practices of capturing animals for the explicit purpose of watching them, such as

those connected with zoos and circuses (Baratay and Hardouin-Fugier). With the advent of photography and cinema various mediated practices of capturing and watching animal behavior have been developed, such as wildlife photography and the popular genre of nature documentaries. In all of them, watching other animals offers the human animal a perspective that involves a play of visibility and invisibility, of recognition and misrecognition of shared life.

This article focuses on a new viewing practice, made possible by the internet. Starting in 1998 with *AfriCam* (www.africam.com), a growing number of websites have been broadcasting animal life in real-time by means of web cameras. Many of these sites are established by conservation foundations or by people sympathetic to conservation. They show animals in relatively wild settings, such as nature refuges, where they are undisturbed by – and generally unaware of – the cams that record their activity. A special type of animal webcam is the nestcam, which targets species of birds and allows viewers to follow the laying and hatching of eggs and the raising of young around the clock. Prime examples include the website of the Hancock Wildlife Foundation (www.hancockwildlife.org), which connects viewers to several nests in British Columbia, the German 'storkcam' (www.storchennest.de) and the vastly popular Dutch site *Beleef de Lente* (*Experience the Spring*, www.beleefdelente.nl). Like *AfriCam*, which had over 30,000 registered users in 2008 (Cerinthe, forumpost), these websites draw large crowds of visitors.[1] The more elaborate ones do not just offer live views, but also provide educational information and have extensive forums where viewers discuss what they see with other viewers. In 2010 the North American Bear Center (www.bear.org) gave visitors to its site a live view of the birth and first months of a black bear cub via a 'den cam'. Mother and daughter entertained a following of over 110,000 fans on their *Facebook* page, lasting well beyond their departure from the den ('Lily the Black Bear').

These projects aim to use technology to provide increasingly urbanised human viewers with 'a lifeline' to nonhuman animals (Attenborough, *Wildlife Focus*). They seek to involve viewers closely and personally in the lives of individual animals, in order to raise awareness of their plight in the industrialised, globalising world. There is a wide range of animal webcams on the internet, including cams broadcasting private pets and zoo animals. I will focus on the conservation oriented sites mentioned above, which are inspired by educational and ethical considerations. Can these sites contribute to new, technologically mediated ways of living together as companion species?

Haraway's work provides a particularly fruitful starting point for analyzing human-animal encounters by webcam. She sees human companionship with other species branching out in two directions, both into biological life and into machines. Technology, in this perspective, is not unnatural. It is an extension of our embodied being-in-the-world. In this light webcams appear as intimate extensions of the human eye and, despite an obvious asymmetry, of the physical presence of both human and other animals involved in the viewing. Haraway makes it emphatically clear that being companion species is not only a fact of life, but has ethical implications. Species interdependence demands respect, in the literal sense of *respecere*: 'seeing again' and 'learning to pay attention' (Haraway 19). It compels human animals in particular to genuine curiosity about the doing and feeling of the other animals they are in contact with.

My question here is how the webcam sites under consideration can contribute to 'seeing again' and to making nonhuman animal companions visible as such. Despite their noble aims, these sites cannot escape evoking tensions between, on the one hand, a spectatorship, based on the capture and objectification of the viewed by the viewer and, on the other hand, a potential for more responsive and responsible kinds of relating to nonhuman animals. Following the work of Vivian Sobchack on documentary film, I will take webcam viewing to be an embodied, situated activity that involves an intentional relationship to the animals viewed (243-248). Viewing initiates action or serves as a substitute for it, but it is also in itself already an act with ethical dimensions. On one level this act is the act of the technology that is employed. This act, and the intentionality it expresses, reflects certain values of the culture in which it arises. It is inscribed in the visual material – in the angle and frame, for instance, in the closeness or distance to the object, or also in the zooms. Yet viewers never completely coincide with the camera eye. Thus another level of relating involved is how viewers connect with the visual material and with the nonhuman animals viewed.

What kind of viewing relationship answers to the demands of living as companion species, and in the context of the topics raised in this issue, how are considerations of place implicated here? Webcams bridge physically distinct places. As such they serve the practical and emotional interests of contemporary lives, spread out over various, often remote, locations. Webcams also create their own place, on the screen. I focus here on a number of relevant characteristics of webcam viewing, as brought out by a phenomenological analysis of the structure of the technology, the visual material and the activity of viewing. This analysis is based

on my own viewing and on observations of user activity on the sites mentioned, an approach introduced by Don Ihde in *Technology and the Lifeworld* and further developed with regard to visual material by Sobchack in *Carnal Thoughts.* What possibilities does the viewing that webcams invite offer for evoking an awareness of a living space and of life shared between human viewers and nonhuman animals? And, conversely, what risks do they pose that, once again, animals will be objectified and rendered invisible as companion species?

I organise my analysis around what I consider two fundamental demands that must be met if nonhuman animals are to appear as companions. The first theme explored here is the connection established by webcams between the place of viewing and the place viewed, since a basic condition of companionship is that another being be seen and experienced as co-present. For viewers to take notice of the viewed as a being with whom they have an actual relationship, viewer and viewed must in some sense share the same world. Mediated presentations can generate their own kind of invisibility by transferring what they show to another realm. In explicitly linking places, webcams have a potential that runs counter to de-realising effects of other media.

Merely experiencing other beings as co-present is not sufficient for species companionship. Objects can be experienced as co-present too. A second fundamental condition is that co-present beings should be experienced as exhibiting co-life, similar to the life of the viewer. The viewed must become visible as a living body with its own perspective on life or, in terms of place, as a being that has its own relationship to its surroundings. The second theme therefore explores the containment of nonhuman animals in the space of the view or, conversely, their power to escape objectification. Only when the animals viewed transcend their role as objects for viewing can a shared life between human and other animals be recognised. I argue that webcam imagery has features that can invite 'haptic' viewing. Haptic viewing, Laura Marks explains, involves a close sensual engagement with the visual material and its object. It breaks the hierarchy of viewing subject over viewed object that characterises optical viewing regimes dominant in the West (13).

I conclude by discussing the obvious asymmetry of webcam viewing and the neglected possibilities that this practice has, its limitations notwithstanding, for making explicit the shared work of human and other animals that too often remains hidden 'behind the scenes'.

Linking places

'It never fails to amaze me that I can sit in my living room and be a part of Africa, the animals are wonderful.' (fairyfeet44, forumpost, qtd. in Armitage 223)

'First thing in the morning I check you and last thing at night. We are never alone. Africam is a lovely way to bring the world together.' (Mary, forumpost, qtd. in Armitage 223)

'Right now, there's 120 viewers watching Apollo sleep. How kewl is that.' (nightowl, forumpost)[2]

'Apollo has turned completely around since I checked in this morning. Cam is still buffering badly.' (jkr, forumpost, 20 Feb. 2010)

Webcam imagery presents live views of animal habitats. In contrast to television, these views are not accompanied by narration and are unedited, though some process of selection is still involved, first of all in the choice of the place shown. Where can one catch animals long enough to obtain a good view of their behavior? Waterholes, nests and dens, and occasionally a feeder, suggest themselves for pragmatic reasons.[3] But these places are also rich in meaning. They tend to display animals in daily life-sustaining activities and in this way to involve viewers, visually and emotionally, in the continuation of the animal life seen.

The places shown are also framed. Cams usually focus on a small range where animals can be seen, up close, without much context. Framing can easily misrepresent the actual situation that animals live in by shutting out nearby roads or buildings. A cam view can make it seem as if animals live in remote untouched paradises. More importantly, it moves animals to another sphere, in much the same way that nature documentaries tend to present nature as an exotic realm, separate from the daily world of human viewers. Most webcam sites, however, provide additional information on the place portrayed; on how the camera was installed and how it is maintained; and on the interactions of, for instance, gamekeepers or conservation biologists

with the environment shown. This re-anchors the cam view in a real world, where animal and human lives intertwine.

Forum discussions on the websites demonstrate that users are interested in information about the places shown. This is not surprising when one realises that the most exciting aspect of webcams is not the representation of animal life. In many respects, film does that much better. What web cameras add to the media landscape is the power to connect viewers to animal habitats in real-time. This connection operates despite the generally low quality of the visuals. Compared to film, views are grainy and often choppy. Lenses get fogged by rain. Animals are only partly in focus or block the view with their bodies.

Fig. 1 Screenshot Sidney Cam, Hancock Wildlife Foundation, May 04, 2010, 7.04 am

In the spring of 2010, users of Hancock Wildlife Foundations' Sidney cam continued watching the raising of the nest's single eaglet despite the fact that the camera lens was clogged by the chick's faecal material (Fig. 1. and Fig. 2.).

Fig. 2 Screenshot Sidney Cam, Hancock Wildlife Foundation, May 26, 2010, 7.47 am

The live views of the birth of a bear cub on North American Bear Center's den cam hardly showed more than the mother's moving backside. All the same, it had the intended effect of turning viewers into bystanders of the actual birth of the cub.

A 'cartoonish epistemology', to borrow a phrase from Haraway (251), implicit in the rhetoric on websites, understands being a bystander in terms of immediacy or 'being there'. According to this epistemology, viewers are magically 'transported' (*Wildlife Focus,* homepage) to remote places by a technology that is hailed as 'new' and 'cutting edge' and considered invisible at the same time.[4] In fact, a number of technological features are openly present, and viewer discussions frequently refer to the position and quality of the camera, hardware and

software used or to bandwidth issues. As the quotes at the beginning of this section also demonstrate, viewers do not forget that they are at home or in the office, viewing animals on a screen by means of cameras, cables and servers. And if they do, the regular breakdown of connections, due to technical difficulties or weather conditions, provides constant reminders. Webcams make places in the world tele-present much less by transparence than by explicitly linking them in real-time.

A crucial element in this process of overt mediation, or 'hypermediacy' (Bolter and Grusin 6), is the running timeline, shown in or right next to most cam views. The timeline in webcam footage indicates the time at the place shown and proves that the connection is live. When the timeline is missing, viewers complain. The webcam here marks itself off from the illusionism of television and documentary that aims to put viewers in the same visual space as the viewed, albeit always in an as-if mode. The time line, to the contrary, organises cam viewing over four separate visual 'sites'. Hinting at the global time zones involved in the viewing, the timeline orients viewers as to their place in the linking by giving them the possibility of comparing the timeline with the time in the physical place where they are situated. The viewing itself takes place in a second site, that of the screen and the website. This process is marked as an event, taking place now, by the running of the timeline, which visually belongs more to the mediated appearance of the site than to the view that opens as a third site within the webspace. The latter, in turn, points at the viewed place situated behind the screen but referred to in the time-line. The visual distinctness of these sites often reflects actual physical distances, but not necessarily. Biologists, game-keepers or care-takers may watch the cam and also pass by the nest, den or waterhole on daily walks. In the timeline, places separated by the screen are at the same time united as explicitly co-present in a common, though patchwork-like, world. Through the linking of places in real-time, individual viewers and animals also become explicitly co-present.

Co-presence, being together now, yet here and there, takes different forms depending on how users relate to the footage. Webcam sites are collected in portals, such as *EarthCam (*www.earthcam.com), that offer 'animals' as one category among others. The quick browsing invited by a row of icons can be characterised as what Tara McPherson (460) aptly calls 'volitional mobility', a giddy gliding over the surface of a globe that is more virtual than real. In browsing, the emphasis is on user pleasure and power of access. Webcam technology appears as

a means of dominating nature by abnegating material distance and other hindrances. The implicit question that the viewers address to the animals being viewed is, 'What do you have to offer, beyond the first impression, to hold my attention?' Most of the time, webcams have very little to offer to this kind of viewing, as the footage is as slow and undramatic as life happens to be.

Regular users of camsites show a different viewing attitude. They mention checking favorite cams several times a day, even ritually, and many viewers keep views open for extended periods of time. User testimonies on websites indicate two distinct ways of relating to the real-time visual presence of animals, and most cam viewing is a combination of both. Distinguishing them according to their different relations to real-time, I will call one 'spotting' and the other 'being with'. Spotting is an act where users catch an animal passing by the camera 'right this instant'. Viewers post their 'catches', complete with screenshots, on the websites' forums. Spotting animals is reminiscent of hunting, whether with rifle or with camera, and screenshots resemble trophies. Like the latter, they reduce animals to inanimate and partial objects. The same reduction is at work when users spot and post instances of allegedly characteristic animal behavior, which cuts down the complexity of animal life to pre-determined types.

Yet regular users also appear to experience spotting animals as a stroke of luck or even a gift. In those instances, domination gives way to chance and animals appear as relatively independent beings. Spotting, not as a screen-grab, but experienced as a surprise meeting, is often mentioned as the starting point for more sustained viewing, when viewers became 'hooked'.

In sustained viewing, which can be seen as a visual 'being-with', users follow animal life closely, in its smallest and (seemingly) trivial details. They keep cam views open while doing other tasks, and their own daily experience is interpenetrated by scenes from animal lives. In sustained viewing, animals shed their status as 'typical particulars' (Sobchack 281) – singular, yet always standing in for their species – that they tend to have in film and wildlife photography. They can appear as concrete individuals, especially in the case of nestcams where a single animal family is followed by viewers for a whole season. Individuality does come at a price: a far-reaching intrusion of the camera and of human eyes into animal life.

Containment and transcendence

'She seems restless, not able to stay still for any length of time. Up and down many times since I started to watch about an hour ago! Off for a quick stretch, back again (this time I saw the egg, as her weight seemed to unbury it) …' (Gemini, forumpost)

'Is it possible to become more addicted to a sleeping bear than a wide awake eagle. I'm going to have to get a larger monitor…' (jkr, forumpost, 2 Feb. 2010)

'6:38 pm Both adults just arrived at the nest, but it's not clear if they brought food. The [eaglet] is watching intently, so it's possible that they're preparing a meal. One of them just left and the other doesn't seem to be feeding, so I think they may have just been checking out the nest.' (JudyB, forumpost)

A simple division suggests itself between wild animals, which live their lives relatively independently and hidden from humans, and domestic animals, whose lives, including the intimate details of their feeding habits and reproductive behavior, are at the disposal of humans. Domestication tends to be accompanied by the containment of certain species in specific places, such as pastures, stables, kennels and cages. It also involves a high degree of objectification of animals and animal parts as fit for purposes defined by humans – cattle for food, watchdogs for guarding property and small birds for the pleasure of their color and song. Following this line of reasoning, webcam broadcasting and viewing can be seen as a form of digital domestication. Animals are captured and contained in the visual space of the camera, 24 hours a day, and incorporated into a human domain for purposes of visual pleasure and knowledge gathering. Many webcam sites actually serve both purposes. Webcams operated by conservation societies increasingly invite citizen observation, blending entertainment, emotional connection and science, while legitimating the first by the last.

Whether for reasons of voyeuristic pleasure or scientific objectivity, the human viewer remains concealed from the nonhuman animals viewed. Jon Dovey has likened reality TV to pornography, inspired by a desire of viewers to come close to a normally hidden reality, but to keep distance from it at the same time (70). Animal webcams exhibit a similar structure. Webcam views open up like peepholes within the larger webspace, which serves as a technological blind behind which viewers hide. Supposedly revealed by this secret looking is the animal 'other', pure and untouched by the viewer's presence. As Midgley argues, human

animals watch other animals to discover difference, but also sameness (18). Animals can show us something about our own animality. Through the webcam, however, animality is observed and kept at a distance at the same time. It belongs first and foremost to the viewed animal and is turned into a spectacle, an object for viewing, which can be enjoyed by the viewing subject, while he or she remains safely separated from it.

The intentionality in hiding viewers behind a computer monitor is double edged though. It also expresses respect for the animals' own existence – especially in comparison with the kinds of viewing practices found at the zoo, the laboratory or wildlife safaris. To an extent, cameras replace these other practices. In webcam viewing, considered as an act, the human viewer retreats from animal places in a kind of electronic tiptoe that represents a growing cultural awareness that when human beings enter animal habitats they often enough do so as intruders, even violent ones.

Framing and camera angle do much to enhance or attenuate voyeuristic attitudes and can give otherwise similar websites quite different characters. Bird cams, for instance, can show nests either from above or from the side. They can present an open view or one half obscured by rocks, branches and nest material. These features influence the feelings evoked by a view in the way they situate the viewer towards the viewed and in the degree of objectification they allow. The effect that framing and angle have on the viewing experience can be illustrated by comparing the den cam of the North American Bear Center, which showed a black bear called 'Lily', to the view of a polar bear called 'Tania' that the Rotterdam zoo Blijdorp broadcast on their website for several months. Both bears were in hibernation and thought to be pregnant, although only in Lily's case did this turn out to be true. The Blijdorp cam was placed in the ceiling of a spacious grotto. It showed Tania from above and at a distance that provided a clear overview of her body at all times, in various sleeping positions. She looked defenseless, given over to prying eyes from all over the world, a feeling that was intensified by the website's claim that it provided viewers with the opportunity to secretly spy on her.[5]

The cam of the North American Bear Center was placed in the upper corner of Lily's den, which was hardly bigger than Lily herself. As a result Lily's body was almost pressed against the lens; most of the time it obstructed the view. As a viewer, one was often unsure what one was seeing, nor could one take up a clearly defined stance towards what was seen. Hindrances to

expectations incorporated in our viewing activity can bring one face to face with one's own desire to see, and can awaken viewers to the presence, the affordances and limitations of the technological set up involved. Where Tania seemed swallowed up by the role she played as an object of spectacle for human viewers, Lily, through these features, kept an existence independent of being a visual object. Her lack of concern for the camera and the human interest in seeing her was also quite obvious. At the same time, she was brought very close, in the intimate space that the computer desktop has become for those human animals who increasingly spend their work and leisure time behind the screen.

The crucial difference between these two ways in which animals appeared visually can be further articulated in terms of the relations to place that were evoked of these respective animals to their surroundings, and by delving deeper into the different kinds of viewing invited by these different websites. To begin with the first, Marjolein Oele notes how an inanimate object is characterised by spatial boundaries (33). It appears as a localisable unity of attributes that can be grasped and fully described. However, an animal that emerges as a living being, she argues, following Plessner, has a presence that goes beyond its particular spatio-temporal qualities. It appears as 'taking its place' (Oele 35) within and against its environment. It is itself a dynamic place, a living body, relating to its environment. Tania was at all times kept at a distance to allow for 'good viewing', and hardly transcended a status as an object controlled and 'kept in place'. With Lily, things were quite different. Seeing her in her den from day to day, with not much more than fur showing, was like touching her with one's eyes. One felt the stirring and turning that made her comfortable and organised her confined situation – it resonated in one's own body.

Provided that cameras are placed properly – that is to say, first of all, respectfully – sustained webcam viewing can speak to the body of the viewer. With their low quality, grainy imagery and, in many situations, lack of clear frame or even focus, webcams can invite 'haptic' viewing. Haptic viewing is mimetic, it 'presses up to the object and takes its shape' (Marks xiii). Marks highlights the differences between haptic viewing and optical viewing. The latter is characterised by a clear subject-object distinction, a distance between viewer and viewed, and has been central to Western ideas of observation and science as gaining control over nature. In haptic viewing a clear perspective is lacking, the distance between viewer and viewed is lost, and viewing subject and viewed object become entwined on the surface of the visual material.

Watching Lily in her den, while indistinct parts of her body filled the screen (cf. fig. 3), one's eyes could not read the image as a representation of an object 'over there', but were brought to continually graze the surface of the screen as well as that of Lily's body.

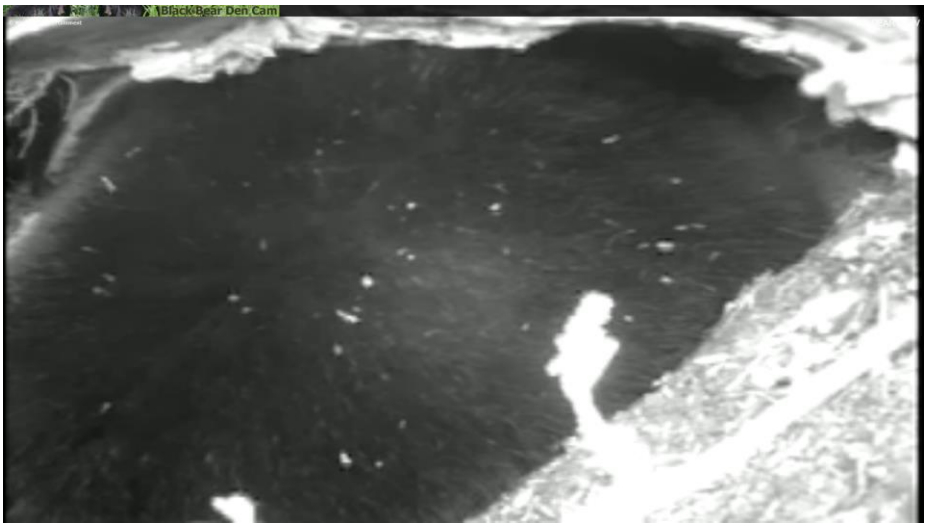

Fig. 3 Black bear Lily, North American Bear Project, March 08, 2010, 20.07 Central European time

Webcam imagery can affect haptic viewing in various ways. An antelope drinks at a waterhole, but its body is turned away from the viewer, foreclosing a look that immediately identifies its shape. Again, the need to sort out the confusion, physically as it were, draws the viewer closer to the screen. A cheetah passes the camera, but one sees only its neck and back gliding by in a view that feels like a caress. With their slow, mechanical pace — as compared to the humanised drama of nature documentary — webcams meticulously show ordinary physical activities. Animals sniff, peck at branches, graze, take a mud bath, drink or respond to cold or wind by putting up their fur or feathers. Little or no narrative tensions lead away from these fundamental ways of interacting with their environment, which viewers recognise in their own bodies through visual and physical mimicry. Where one cannot follow, the intimacy of the view seduces one to imaginatively extend the experience of one's own body. We are mammals and not birds. Still, it is not hard to feel what it would be like to shake one's feathers, if one had them. Much discussion on the forums registers and seeks to interpret the very basic activities shown.

Another aspect of cam viewing that contributes to experiencing the animals seen as active, living beings is the rigid nature of the camera. Where documentary inevitably catches the animal subject and in following its movements also subjects it to the lens, webcams often fail to show what they promise. Involved in their environment, animals move in and out of view. Most of the time, no animals pass by a waterhole. Even in the relatively fixed situation of nestcams, while the birds sit in view for many weeks, tending their eggs, they do leave the nest for food. When their young grow up, the parents are back and forth all the time, and eventually the family leaves altogether. Viewers spend much of their time waiting for animals to appear. Forum discussions record this uncontrollable movement. To an extent, what is captured are not the animals, but the viewers, transfixed before the screen, caught in the set-up of the camera and their own longing to see.

Capture and containment, proposed here as features of domestication, also have a metaphorical sense: they signify the appropriation of animal life through increasing knowledge and familiarity. What is striking about forum communications, both among viewers and between viewers and expert researchers, is how little is known about the animal life seen. Nor does greater knowledge necessarily exclude wonder. In being struck by wonder, viewers become more acquainted with animal life and are drawn out of themselves at the same time. Users and researchers alike speak of being touched and of their growing respect for animals.

'My premise is that touch ramifies and shapes accountability,' Haraway (36) states. Our sense of sight can operate from a distance, but touch implies closeness. In being touched, the body is affected from outside. Touch takes place in the boundary traffic between self and other. It brings the body to life as sensing and sensitive (Oele 30). As such it is not passive, but as Lyotard (243) calls it, 'passible': actively open, vulnerable and dependent on something outside of it. Touch makes us feel our body as our own, but also our interdependence with the world and other beings outside our bodies.

Vinciane Despret (122) proposes an alternative reading of domestication, not as a process of capture and control, but as a slow mutual 'attunement' (125) of humans and animals. In this process both parties show curiosity towards each other; both have to learn to communicate and develop a body language other than their own, one that the other can pick up. The close, haptic viewing that webcams can provoke, contributes at least to an attunement of

viewers' bodies to the bodies of the nonhuman animals viewed. Where this actually takes place, not only animals, but viewers too, are domesticated. Trying to understand the life they see and feel through haptic visuality, human viewers tap into the embodied life they share with nonhuman animals.

Sharing work space

If living as companion species, in the sense of a profound ethical transformation of human-animal relations, starts, as Jacques Derrida (4) suggests, from feeling the look of an animal fall on us, webcams seem to be of little help. Cam viewing is one-sided, and notwithstanding the potential for touch outlined above, the relation is anything but symmetrical. Human animals set up the technological system, and they do all the looking. Where they remain out of view of animals, they are never directly challenged in their understanding of the world by eyes that are looking at them. The extent to which viewers recognise shared life remains largely a matter of their own sensitivity to a touch that is issued indirectly. Haptic imagery can 'encourage' (Marks 3) a bodily relationship between viewers, visual material and the nonhuman animals shown, but it requires viewers that are open to its suggestion. Where companionship demands, as Haraway (253) proposes, 'eating bread with' each other, webcam viewing can at most function as a preliminary to that relationship by stimulating active curiosity about animals.

Nevertheless, animals' involvement in the practice of cam viewing is not limited to being visual objects, nor even, to their appearance, in the better situations, as independent subjects. Here again, Haraway provides a useful point of departure. Following Ihde's position in *Bodies in Technology* (137), that relationships of use with technology are mutual, she points out the adaptations that technologies demand of bodies, but also vice versa. She suggests conceiving of human–technology–animal set-ups as 'compounds' that require physical and hermeneutic 'work' from all parties (Haraway 250).

To begin with the issue of physical work, though animals are unaware of the technologically mediated relationship of their bodies to other bodies, their behavior and well-being put demands on the compound. Cameras and cables should be small or otherwise

unobtrusive so as not to hinder them, and they also need to be relatively indestructible. Moreover, one does not replace damaged equipment in an active nest or den. When equipment malfunctions, the human viewers are often faced with the choice of having to adjust to lack of focus, obstructions and intermittent visual material, or not to look at all. Interestingly, 'hooked' viewers often do adapt, as is illustrated by the case of the Hancock Wildlife Foundation's Sidney nest mentioned above. The work relationship between human and other animals does, however, involve an odd game of absence and presence. Cameras tend to be set up when animals are away, and when the cameras start to operate, the humans leave to hide.

Being viewed may affect animals' physical lives. Some events that are spotted by viewers lead to action. When it appeared that Lily and her cub had become accidentally separated after they left the den, researchers helped them to find each other again and videotaped the moving reunion for their *Facebook* fans. When Lily left her offspring behind a second time, they did not intervene again, but did leave the cub with extra food. Researchers do not interfere in the fierce sibling rivalry among eaglets, but they may try to save an eaglet or young stork that has fallen from the nest. For the most part a balance is maintained between sentimental inclinations, the responsibility evoked through seeing and a recognition of the dangers of interfering with 'the course of nature'.

Nonhuman animals are also agents in the hermeneutic labor that characterises webcam viewing. It is their behavior and life that speaks to viewers, though here the relationship is most obviously asymmetrical as animals are unaware of being viewed. Their behavior, therefore, is not directed at viewers but simply taken up by them. That this process can still generate 'contact zones' (Haraway 263) and stimulate more responsible ways of relating to nonhuman animals is a hope fostered by many webcam projects. In this article I have offered a qualified legitimisation for this hope.

Much more work can be done in improving the way nonhuman animals are allowed to appear through web cameras, as is shown by the unfortunate example of Tania. Also, while websites do contain information about the involvement of animal bodies in the animal–technology–human compound, this could be further explicated. In recalling the development of *AfriCam*, Armitage (16-17) tells some delightful stories of animals digging up and chewing on the cables their human counterparts had laid the day before. The World Wildlife Fund ('Camera

traps yield…') released intriguing footage, taken by a camera trap in the Sumatran jungle, of a mother tiger and her cubs sniffing and possibly licking a camera they passed by. A blog post on September 20, 2010 on *Wildlife Focus* mentions similar footage of a jaguar, but does not actually show it. Imagery like this is crucial however. It challenges one-sided spectatorship, awakens human viewers to their voyeurism and to the different, more explicitly physical, relationship of nonhuman animals to the camera. This imagery has the power to remind us of the actual material and physical relationships that underlie mere spectacle. Taken together with the haptic quality of cam viewing, it can ignite serious reflection on the current state of the companionship of human and nonhuman animals.

Notes

1. The Dutch society for the protection of birds that operates *Beleef de Lente* (*Experience the Spring*) received over 1,000,000 unique visitors for the 2010 and 2011 seasons ('Beleef de Lente', *Mobilion*).

2. Apollo is the name given to a hibernating white bear, shown on http://www.bcspiritbear.com/ in the winter of 2010

3. 'Camera traps' are another solution. Placed in remote areas, they are triggered by motion. Because they provide footage very intermittently, camera traps are hardly used for connecting with a wider audience.

4. This rhetoric was very prominent on the, now discontinued, website of National Geographic's *WildCam* project (*WildCam*, 'homepage'). On other camsites it is more subdued.

5. The Dutch word used by the zoo's online newsletter was 'gluren' ('to leer') ('Nieuwsbrief', *Diergaarde Blijdorp*).

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